DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 425 378 CG 028 926

AUTHOR Maxson, Thomas Z.
TITLE Parenting Style: Effects on Children's Views of Authority.
PUB DATE 1998-08-00
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (106th, San Francisco, CA, August 14-18, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Authoritarianism; *Child Rearing; Children; College Students; Higher Education; Individual Development; Parent Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

Children's development and future views have been found to be affected dramatically by the actions and styles of parenting they experience. The relationship between parenting style and a person's later view of authority is explored in this study using two self-report measures (N=109). It was hypothesized that the college students who scored higher on the Authority Behavior Index, implying a greater acceptance of authority, would have been raised in homes utilizing a more authoritative parenting style. Those homes high in strictness and involvement would hypothetically, due to high nurturance and limit setting, lead to a greater acceptance of authority. The results suggest that children raised in more authoritative homes do have a more positive view of authority than children raised in homes where other parenting styles were used. However, the lack of a significant main effect of involvement and the lack of an interaction between involvement and strictness suggests that strictness is the main variable accounting for the difference in view of authority. Suggestions for future research are provided, including the possibility of a curvilinear function of authority by strictness. (EMK)

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ED 425 378

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Parenting Style: Effects on Children's Views of Authority

Thomas Z. Maxson

American Psychological Association Annual Convention

1998

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Abstract

Children's development and future views have been found to be affected dramatically by the actions and styles of parenting they experience. The effects of parenting style have even been observed in a college student population. One question not explored in previous research is the relationship between parenting style and a person's later view of authority. In the current study, this relationship was examined using two self-report measures, Steinberg's Authoritative Parenting Scale and the Authority Behavior Index. It was hypothesized that the college students who scored higher on the Authority Behavior Index, implying a greater acceptance of authority, would have been raised in homes utilizing a more authoritative parenting style. Those homes high in strictness and involvement would hypothetically, due to high nurturance and limit setting, lead to a greater acceptance of authority. The results suggest that children raised in more authoritative homes do have a more positive view of authority than children raised in homes where other parenting styles were used. However, the lack of a significant main effect of involvement and the lack of an interaction between involvement and strictness, suggests that strictness is the main variable accounting for the difference in view of authority. Suggestions for future research are provided, including the possibility of a curvilinear function of authority by strictness.

Parenting Style: Effects on Children's Views of Authority

Each child is a bit different from another. These differences come about from a variety of biological and environmental factors. One of the environmental factors that exerts an influence on the development of the personality of the child is the style of parenting that parents utilize to rear their children. The purpose of this study is to see if a relationship exists between the parenting style used by parents and the college student's current views of authority.

Various studies have focused on Baumrind's three original parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (Baumrind, 1968) as expanded to four in light of subsequent research with the division of permissive into permissive indulgent and permissive neglectful (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Each parenting style is characterized along two continuous dimensions, demandingness and responsiveness. Demandingness refers to the established expectations and rules set by the parents for the conduct of the children. Responsiveness refers to the parents being sensitive to the child's needs, supportive of the child's efforts, and interested in what the child is thinking, feeling, and doing (Kimmel & Weiner, 1995). For the current study, the strictness scale of the Steinberg Authoritative Parenting Measure will measure demandingness and the involvement scale will measure responsiveness. Authoritative parenting is characterized by high strictness and high responsiveness, authoritarian parenting is characterized by high strictness and low responsiveness, permissive indulgent parenting is characterized by low strictness and high responsiveness, and permissive neglectful parenting is characterized by low strictness and low responsiveness (see Figure 1).

These four parenting styles have been studied extensively as to how each may affect the child's behavior and views as related to achievement, behavior problems, and self-perceptions. Some studies have linked children from authoritative homes as scoring higher in competence, achievement, social development, and self-perception (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Others have explained developmental variations in academic achievement, psychosocial development, and behavior problems through differences in parenting style (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Yet others have demonstrated that children raised in authoritative homes perform better in school, have greater work orientations, and lower levels of misconduct such as cheating or copying assignments than their peers (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991 & Patterson & Yoerger, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1989, as cited in Steinberg et al., 1992).

Though there is much consensus concerning the impact that different parenting styles have upon a child's development and behavior, there is a lack of research concerning the relationship between parenting style and the child's view of established authority. Children raised in authoritative homes have demonstrated a respect for established authority by performing well in school, and by avoiding such misconduct as cheating or copying (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991 & Patterson & Yoerger, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1989, as cited in Steinberg et al., 1992). Children raised in permissive homes challenge and test the limits of established authority through increased alcohol and drug use as well as other higher levels of misconduct (Baumrind, 1991). Perhaps, the results on the difference of behavior problems in general could be attributed to a more positive view of the authority that has established the rules and guidelines to live by. It would be logical to state that authoritative parenting, high in strictness and

responsiveness, leads to a respect that is generalized to other authority figures, thus resulting in children from authoritative homes demonstrating fewer behavior problems, as demonstrated in previous studies (Steinberg et al., 1992), and a more positive attitude toward authority. It is hypothesized that children raised in homes utilizing a more authoritative style will have a more positive attitude and view toward authority than their peers from homes with other parenting styles.

Method

Sample

A sample of 109 undergraduate students was taken from a mid-sized midwestern university. All of the students were enrolled in introductory psychology courses were used for the study. The participants had a mean age of 19.7 with a range of 19 to 32.

Measures

Each participant completed a demographic sheet, an authoritative parenting measure, and an authority behavior index.

Demographic Variables. Students provided information concerning their age, current college GPA, marital status as well as the marital status of their father and mother, population of their hometown, and to what extent they practiced a religion.

Authoritative Parenting Measure. The updated version of Steinberg's Authoritative Parenting Measure (Lamborn et al. 1991) was used (by permission) to divide participants into one of four parenting style groups based on the involvement and strictness scales. The

participants were asked to complete the self-report measure as to the atmosphere of their home life during the high school years.

Authority Behavior Index. The Authority Behavior index (Rigby, 1987) was used to assess the participant's acceptance of authority. It is a self-report measure in which participants answer questions as to their behaviors. Participants whom scored higher on the index had a more pro-authority attitude and would exhibit more pro-authority behavior than those that scored lower. A participant with a higher score, and thus presumably a higher acceptance of authority, is more likely to follow rules and obey the social demands that include the legal obligation to conform. This could encompass such activities as obeying traffic regulations and refraining from illegal drug and alcohol abuse. Participants were asked to respond as to their feelings and attitudes toward authority now as college students.

Results

Participants were divided into one of four groups (Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive Indulgent, and Permissive Neglectful) using a median split of the involvement scale and the strictness scale of Steinberg's parenting measure (Figure 1). The scales were scored using the standard scales and scoring (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994).

A factorial analysis of variance with the independent variables being strictness and involvement and the dependent variable being the authority behavior index score was used to check for main and interaction effects of view of authority by groups. The factorial ANOVA found a significant main effect for strictness $F(1,105) = 22.421$ $p = .000$ and a non-significant

main effect of involvement $F(1,105) = .108$ $p = .743$ as well as no interaction of the two $F(1,105) = .015$ $p = .902$.

These results indicate that there are no significant differences between the Authoritative and Authoritarian groups or between the Permissive Indulgent and Permissive Neglectful groups (see figure 1) indicating that perhaps involvement in parenting is not as influential as strictness in determining behavior toward authority.

Correlation coefficients were calculated for other variables hypothesized to be related to attitude and behavior toward authority including parent's marital status, hometown populations, GPA, and strength of religious conviction of the subjects. The only significant correlations that were found though were between religious conviction $r(112) = .4884$ $p < .01$ and GPA $r(112) = .2373$ $p < .01$ with the authority behavior index score indicating that stronger religious conviction and higher GPA are related to higher authority behavior index scores, and thus more positive behavior.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the present study partially support the hypothesis that children raised in more authoritative homes would score higher on the authority behavior index than all of the other groups. The group raised in more authoritative homes did score significantly higher than both of the permissive groups. Interestingly, the lack of a significant effect of involvement points to a lack of significant difference between the Authoritative and Authoritarian groups and the lack of significant difference between the Permissive Indulgent and the Permissive Neglectful groups which differ on involvement. However, the significant effect of strictness seems to support an

idea that the strictness component of parenting makes more of a difference in determining pro-authority attitudes and behavior than the involvement component.

The lack of a significant effect of involvement for the Authoritative and Authoritarian groups and between the Permissive groups could be attributed to the limited diversity of the sample. The sample was selected from a group of college students. This sample would presumably have less variability and diversity in family backgrounds than would be expected in the general population. This limited diversity may have caused the involvement scores to be close together, thus not allowing for a distinct division between the high and low involvement for an even median split to occur. Future research may want to gather data from a larger and more diverse population, (i.e. subjects in addition to just college students). This change would greatly improve the generalizability of the results beyond the college student population.

As predicted by past research, higher academic achievement, as measured by GPA, did correlate significantly with higher authority index scores. A new finding of this study was that strength of religious conviction was correlated with approval of authority. Presumably, religion requires obedience to a figure or philosophy of authority; thus the individual is more likely to follow other authority.

A final thought for future research is that the results seem to indicate that the nurturance or involvement of the parents does not seem to be as important to determining attitude and behavior toward authority as the strictness and limit setting of the parents. This could be addressed in future research by sampling a larger and more diverse sample. Future research could also address the issue of whether there is a curvilinear relationship to this phenomenon. It is reasonable to

suggest that there is an upper limit of strictness that fosters pro-authority behavior. After this limit is reached, such extreme strictness may begin to precipitate less pro-authority attitudes and behavior as the child experiences greater freedom of choice.

Figure 1

Parenting Style by Group

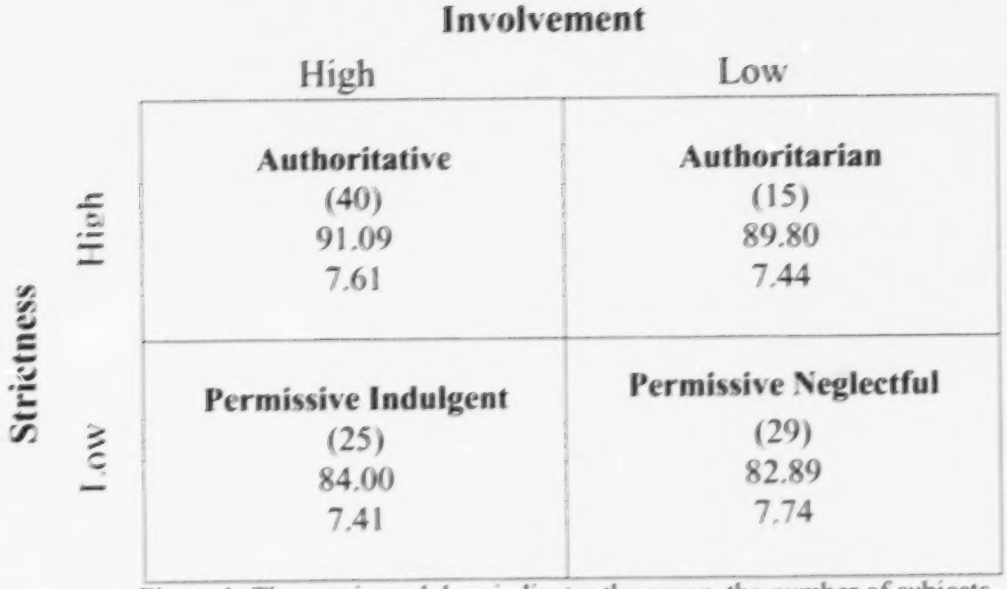

Figure 1: The text in each box indicates the group, the number of subjects, the mean authority behavior index score, and the standard deviation.

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